DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 426 185 CE 076 964

TITLE	Realising the Learning Age. A Response to the Government Green Paper from the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education.
INSTITUTION	National Inst. of Adult Continuing Education, Leicester (England).
PUB DATE	1998-07-00
NOTE	18p.
AVAILABLE FROM	National Institute for Adult Continuing Education, 21B De Montfort Street, Leicester LE1 7GE, England, United Kingdom (free).
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Counseling; Adult Education; Adult Programs; Change Strategies; *Continuing Education; Credits; Education Work Relationship; Educational Change; Educational Needs; *Educational Policy; Financial Support; Foreign Countries; Government Role; *Government School Relationship; Higher Education; *Lifelong Learning; Needs Assessment; Participation; Position Papers; Program Improvement; Public Policy
IDENTIFIERS	*Great Britain; Individual Learning Accounts (England); *Learning Society

ABSTRACT

Great Britain's National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) generally accepts the vision and analysis in the British government green paper "The Learning Age." The NIACE accepts the paper's analysis of the challenges facing Great Britain if it is to become a learning society, and it welcomes the government's commitment to expand further and higher education by 500,000 places. The following principles underpinning the green paper are also endorsed: investing in learning to benefit everyone; lifting barriers to learning; putting people first; sharing responsibility with employers, employees, and the community; achieving world class standards and value for money; and working together as a key to success. The following initiatives are also endorsed by the NIACE: university for industry, individual learning accounts, credit, and widening participation. However, the NIACE also believes that the green paper should have included more attention to such issues as the following: clear allocation of responsibility for creation and resourcing of a coherent network of local advice and guidance provision for adults; challenges in meeting the learning aspirations of people living in inner cities or rural communities; and ways provision can be scaled up to implement and deliver training through the use of new technologies. (MN)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 426 185

Realising The Learning Age

A response to the Government Green Paper from the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education

July 1998

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Man

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2A

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

NIACE
THE NATIONAL ORGANISATION FOR ADULT LEARNING

CE076964

REALISING THE LEARNING AGE:
A Response to the Government Green Paper from the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education

1. The NIACE response to The Learning Age consultation:

   - warmly welcomes the breadth and generosity of vision in *The Learning Age* and, in particular, David Blunkett's foreword in which he recognises that 'as well as securing our economic future, learning has a wider contribution. It helps make ours a civilised society, develops the spiritual side of our lives and promotes active citizenship.'
   - accepts much of the analysis in the paper on the challenges facing us if we are to become a learning society;
   - welcomes the commitment to expansion of further and higher education by 500,000 places,
   - and endorses the six principles on which the paper's vision is built:
     - investing in learning to benefit everyone;
     - lifting barriers to learning;
     - putting people first;
     - sharing responsibility with employers, employees and the community; *(NIACE prefers individuals, employers and the state)*
     - achieving world class standards and value for money; and
     - working together as a key to success;
   - the Four Big Ideas:
     - University for Industry
     - Individual Learning Accounts
     - Credit
     - Widening Participation.

University for Industry

2. NIACE recognises the powerful potential of the major initiatives announced in the Green Paper to contribute to the achievement of the vision, and to extend and widen participation in learning. The University for Industry will be able to draw on the experience of broadcasting in mobilising people to take up learning (e.g. the BBC's 'Computers Don't Bite' and 'Family Literacy' campaigns), as well as exploiting the potential of the new technologies. It will also benefit from developments in the creation of local learning centres, and from the experience of national guidance helplines. Its success will, we believe, rely on its effective development of the role of learning broker - matching need and aspiration with supply of learning opportunities.

Individual Learning Accounts

3. Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs) have the potential to stimulate increased investment in learning by individuals, employers and the state, and offer a mechanism for state support to be differentially weighted in favour of under-

represented groups. At their best they should offer a wider population the benefits that well run and supported Employee Development Schemes offer to many people at work.

Credit

4. *The Learning Age* makes proposals which are in effect moves to create parallel credit frameworks for further and higher education. NIACE recognises the practical inhibitions to moving immediately to creating a unified credit framework for lifelong learning. However, the Institute believes that the creation of such a framework is essential if a learning society is to be achieved, and need to study incrementally and discontinuously. Since most adults need to fit their learning into busy lives credit fits naturally with unitisation of study.

Kennedy

5. NIACE welcomes, too, the endorsement of the recommendations of the Kennedy Report, *Learning Works*, with its recommendation that for participation to be widened new learners need a concentration of resources to support them in acquiring the confidence and capacity to learn independently. NIACE strongly supports Kennedy's proposals for a New Learning Pathway.

Integration

6. These proposals are inter-linked. Each we believe, relies on the others for the vision in *The Learning Age* of a society where individuals and communities are able to make use of learning opportunities throughout their lives to foster economic prosperity, and social cohesion, and to enable personal and community development to be realised. The development of the University for Industry as a national tool for stimulating demand, and matching need with supply, backed by ILAs, as a mechanism for supporting individuals, and ideally groups, to resource their learning; where study can be pursued in bite-sized chunks, with credit accumulated over time, and in different places, backed by responsive and supportive providers, resourced adequately to secure progress for learners is, we believe, achievable.

Guidance

7. However, the new initiatives all rely on learners and potential learners having access to guidance and advice. NIACE welcome the establishment of Learning Direct, for which we argued for some years, and to link it to the University for Industry. Nevertheless for UfI to succeed, the national phone line will not be enough. NIACE regrets the failure of the Green Paper to clearly allocate responsibility for the creation and resourcing of a coherent network of local advice and guidance provision for adults, either as part of UfI or by another means. We consider the location of responsibility for co-ordinating networks in Stephen McNair's appendix on guidance, and argue UfI could play such a role, as long as it is developed as a broad inclusive institution, along the lines we argue in this paper. NIACE also regrets the failure to recognise the importance

of fostering 'barefoot guidance' skills among opinion-formers in communities, and among supervisors and shop stewards in the workplace.

Division and Exclusion: Widening Participation

8. There is a danger that the same initiatives that might lead to a more inclusive society where everyone feels able and confident to learn, could be developed in a way that increases the learning divide that characterises Britain now. Short term pressures, and the real need for skills for industrial competitiveness in international markets may lead the UfI to focus too narrowly on a skills based curriculum. The practical challenges to be overcome in introducing ILAs may make them more accessible to people already comfortable and experienced as adult learners - reinforcing the exclusion of those who do not have access to learning opportunities now. The delicacy of inter-agency negotiations on credit and qualifications may leave us without the necessary framework for an inclusive, user-friendly system, and financial pressure on providers may deny learners the support needed to follow recruitment with improved retention and achievement.

9. NIACE is excited by the possibilities the Green Paper suggests, but we believe that the Government missed an opportunity to sketch out how its grand design would work. Had it done so, we believe the paper would inevitably have recognised the dangers of reinforcing the exclusion of those who have benefited least from post-school education and training. Whilst the paper explores welcome practical steps to be taken to raise standards of achievement, and to revitalise Britain's skills, it has little to say in detail about how learning that fosters citizenship, or respects and celebrates cultural diversity can be developed.

10. *The Learning Age* has almost nothing to say on the different challenges facing the country in meeting the learning aspirations of people living in its inner cities, or its rural communities, although these will significantly affect the delivery of UfI; it has little to say about the contribution to be made to the achievement of the vision by Britain's black communities; or about the challenges facing people with learning difficulties in securing an adult curriculum that will support them in exercising their rights and duties as citizens in an informed way. It does not say enough about the learning needs of older people.

11. It is not sufficiently clear about the central role of the local authority in securing provision to address such needs, or of the vital and imaginative role voluntary associations can play in meeting them innovatively. There is, as a result, something of a gap between the vision in David Blunkett's foreword, and in the initial chapter of the paper, and the detailed measures proposed in the following sections of the paper.

12. More importantly, it is because the different needs of different groups are not adequately recognised, that there is a danger that the short-term developments of the paper's big ideas will not be sufficiently inclusive, and may not deliver opportunities to those the Government wishes to support. It is, in our view,

essential that UfI has a brief to widen participation as well as to build skills in small and medium sized enterprises; that pilots for the introduction of Individual Learning Accounts include under-represented groups; and that moves to put greater choice in the hands of learners are accompanied by measures to secure stable, confident and skilled supply in LEAs, in colleges, in universities, and in the voluntary and private sectors.

New Technology

13. NIACE recognises that the Green Paper contains the most positive statement by any government about the use of new technologies to support learning, but is concerned that the paper does not fully answer how provision can be scaled up, to implement and deliver learning through the use of new technologies. Most of the adult population are not confident users of information and communication technology (ICT), and have doubts about its relevance for them. Most teachers and trainers need support to use ICT effectively with learners. Most open and distance learning materials are currently paper based, and the firms with skills in developing computer based learning materials lack the resources for short-term substantial growth. In addition, we need to know more about how to deliver quality learning materials to a wide range of learners through telecommunications.

Creativity, Culture, Citizenship and the Collective

14. David Blunkett's foreword to *The Learning Age* captures the intimacy of the connection between creativity, learning, social movements and economic regeneration in his celebration of Victorian working people's ingenuity in using learning to create new social forms. For the Government's vision to be realised, policy must be developed which creates the conditions for that intimacy to be renewed.

15. There is much to build on as the European Year of Lifelong Learning showed and Adult Learners' Week demonstrates each year - from the development and management of employee development programmes by Ford and its unions; the alliance of Tetley's brewery and a local college in Leeds to make pubs a site of learning; from the explosive growth of Universities of the Third Age to Northern College's short course programme; from Castleford Women's Centre to UNISON's Return to Learn scheme.

16. Yet much more remains to be done to foster active citizenship. The Green Paper concentrates on individual aspiration at the expense of what we learn together. It gives too little priority to the important role voluntary organisations can play in the evolution of a learning ~~so~~ciety. Voluntary bodies like the WEA, the National Federation of Women's Institutes and the Pre-School Learning Alliance have proud records in creating and sustaining new forms of learning. But so, too, do the development agencies and environmental groups that have pioneered approaches to sustainable development to take just one example. In 1919, the Board of Adult Education of the Ministry of Reconstruction

recognised the important role of voluntary agencies in its distinguished report. It argued:

> "In a modern community voluntary organisation must always occupy a prominent place. The free association of individuals is a normal process in civilised society, and one which arises from the inevitable inadequacy of State and municipal organisation. It is not primarily a result of defective public organisation; it grows out of the existence of human needs which the state and municipality cannot satisfy. Voluntary organisations, whatever their purpose, are fundamentally similar in their nature, in that they unite for a definite point of view, a common outlook, and a common purpose which gives it a corporate spirit of its own. This corporate spirit is, perhaps, the most valuable basis for group study. It is to be found in trade unions, adult schools, co-operative societies and other bodies. Voluntary organisations, consequently, form the best nucleus for adult classes."

17. The Government recognises some of this in its decision to establish the Trade Union Learning Fund and the Adult and Community Learning Fund. Yet there is a clear need for further work on how best voluntary bodies, backed by colleges, LEAs and universities can contribute to revitalising learning for active citizenship.

Voluntary Sector

18. Voluntary agencies have an important role in inter-agency collaboration. Voluntary agencies like SKILL and MENCAP play a vital role in helping health, social services and education agencies to collaborate effectively to meet the needs of adults with learning difficulties, and agencies like CHANGE give voice to the experience of learners. Parallel collaborative planning has been achieved through Single Regeneration budget initiatives, and City Challenge programmes in local communities. NIACE welcomes the emergence of these approaches in the Better Government for Older People programme, and in the work of the Social Exclusion Unit and commends DfEE to explore shared strategies with DFID, DETR, the Health Department and the Home Office. It is important to remember that in partnerships instigated by public bodies an equal voice needs to be secured for voluntary sector participants.

Arts and Crafts

19. Another area for connectedness in government thinking, to support the realisation of *The Learning Age* is in the field of the arts and the encouragement of creativity. In practice, local adult education services have long combined a variety of roles to support participation in and appreciation of the arts. Like the Medicis, LEAs have acted as patrons who help to create conditions for practising artists to do their own work by offering some financial security through part-time teaching. Classes in the arts and crafts offer learners the chance to develop as practitioners, and liberal studies foster an appreciation of the moral, spiritual, and aesthetic challenges great art confronts us with. It is no accident that the Arts Council, like the British Film Institute, grew out of

NIACE: the arts have a central role in the learning we do to make sense of our lives and to express ourselves fully. Yet such work has been squeezed through the 1990s. It needs encouragement.

Broadcasting

20. The curriculum range of studies which encourage critical understanding, active citizenship and a lively engagement with difference is immense. It finds expression nowhere so well as in broadcasting. The UK retains an intelligent, wide-ranging and inclusive public broadcasting milieu - which plays a leading role in informing understanding of public affairs, in stimulating curiosity and extending access to the arts and sciences. This inheritance grew out of the obligations on all broadcasters, which held until the 1990 Broadcasting Act, to educate, inform and entertain. The obligation to educate was removed from independent television franchise holders in 1990. Yet terrestrial television has a continuing and unparalleled capacity to promote participation, as e.g. 'Computers Don't Bite' and Adult Learners' Week. NIACE is convinced that all terrestrial broadcasters need to be accountable (after the event) for the contribution they make to the cultural changes necessary to achieve the learning society. We are convinced too, that motivation is a key to success in that change, and that the broadcasters have a vital role in motivating people to participate.

Citizenship

21. NIACE recognises that technological and social change are having a significant impact on our understanding of our relations with each other, and with the state. As much of our lives becomes increasingly private, we see declining levels of formal participation in voting and in other communal activities. The process of constitutional change the Government has instigated needs revitalised tools for the expression of democracy - in different ways focus groups measure what people think whilst deliberative polling and liberal adult education in their different ways foster people's learning about public policy, and the role they might play in it. NIACE believes the Government should make a commitment to adult citizenship education to complement the work of the Crick Committee - to engage people in remaking the forms of active democracy.

22. What is needed overall is a strategy to support learning for cultural change: change that respects and celebrates difference; that supports the articulation of the hopes of people currently marginalised, and that delights in creativity. If the major initiatives the Government introduces adopt that strategy then they really will make a difference.

Finance

23. None of this can be achieved without money. NIACE welcomes the commitment in the Comprehensive Spending Review to secure greater investment in education. We endorse the view of the finance and funding task force of the National Advisory Group for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning that 'the most pressing need for greater public investment lies with

those who benefited least from initial education, and are currently not participating.' We agree that 'to meet their needs will require a further shift in the balance of public investment,' to be balanced by an increase in other funding streams.

24. The experience of the Government in its introduction of the New Deal illustrates the challenge. The introduction of a Gateway preparatory study period for New Deal for young people has been widely welcomed. Yet the 25+ New Deal, which targets people out of the labour force for extended periods, and overwhelmingly the least qualified and educationally confident, has no such preparatory period, apparently because of cost pressures. There is plenty of experience of how to contest social exclusion successfully - but it does not come cheap.

25. New money is needed, but new money alone will not meet the scale of the challenge. An active learning culture will need to draw on our communal capacity to generate resources (of hope, energy and imagination, as well as of cash) to make possible the tasks beyond the reach of the public purse. To return to David Blunkett's foreword, it was the release of the imagination of the people that fuelled the municipal flowering of the Victorian era. A key challenge for *The Learning Age* is to unlock the key to our imaginations now.

26. *The Learning Age* poses considerable challenges to existing practice. Nevertheless, its proposals represent the first clear and comprehensive statement of Government commitment to lifelong learning, and NIACE will support work to realise its vision.

27. Turning to more detailed measures, NIACE :
- is pleased to support the Government's initiative to revitalise community based initiatives in lifelong learning in sharing the administration of the Adult and Community Learning Fund;
- is similarly pleased to welcome the creation of the Employee Development Education Fund;
- and welcomes the extension of loans to learners pursuing higher education courses in their early fifties, whilst looking forward to the day when learners of all ages can expect equal access to support for learning.

28. *What was previously available only to the few can, in the century ahead, be something which is enjoyed and taken advantage of by the many - David Blunkett.* NIACE believes that if this vision is to be realised, the Government needs to address a number of key issues. In particular:

- **part-time students need parity of treatment with full-time students**. A learning age in which all can participate will not be able to afford to continue to discriminate by mode of study; NIACE recommends that parity of treatment in financial support for students be achieved within the lifetime of one Parliament, and that moves to harmonise student support in further and higher education be introduced by 2002. We agree with NAGCELL's Finance and Funding Group's approach to this question;

- **the duty on local authorities to secure 'adequate facilities for further education' needs to be clarified in a Government circular**, following consultation with the Local Government Association. NIACE is convinced that local authorities have a pivotal role in securing a learning society as multi-purpose, democratically accountable local agencies, as important employers, and as opinion formers. For too long the LEA duty to secure adequate facilities has been treated as if it were discretionary, with the tacit support of central government. A clear statement of the importance of this statutory duty, backed as soon as possible with funding, is essential if we are to be able to realise the wider contribution of learning in making a civilised society. NIACE commends the framework for LEA responsibility described in the Welsh Green Paper, '*Learning is for Everyone*', and the proposals for a circular outlined in the Fryer Report. '*Learning for the Twenty First Century*' suggests that a circular should make clear that each local authority's development plan should:
- *explain how it has assessed adequacy;*
- *set out how it plans to secure adequate provision;*
- *propose how it intends to audit existing learning provision and map need, in partnership with other local organisations and interests;*
- *identify its targets for participation (including targets for under-represented groups), curriculum range and levels offered;*
- *include its strategy for family learning;*
- *explain the roles and relationships of the elements of lifelong learning - relating the adult plan to the youth service, early years, and school-community link plans, and to the lifelong learning impact of other local authority services;*
- *describe its mechanisms for quality assurance, staff development and for monitoring success;*
- *identify what resources, and especially information and communications technology resources, are available to learners;*
- *indicate its standard spending assessment and planned expenditure on adult education.*

NIACE recognises this last proposal cannot be achieved until the Government and the Local Government Association agree a mechanism to identify clearly the adult education element in standard spending assessment allocations. The purpose of the proposals is not to secure a neat and tidy set of requirements for each LEA, but a framework responsive to local need whilst securing a minimum platform of provision.

- **the Government should review the effectiveness of these arrangements in LEAs after three years;**

- **the duty of the Further Education Funding Councils to secure adequate facilities for further education for adults should also be clarified**, and that clarification should take into account the important proposals made in the two FEFC reports '*Inclusive Learning*' and '*Learning Works*', and in

particular the proposal for the introduction of a New Learning Pathway. It should also ensure effective mutual consultation and planning between FEFC and individual LEAs, TECs, and others;

- **the Government should establish a mechanism to review the coherence and adequacy of the offer made as a result of LEA, FEFC and TEC decisions.** We return to this below when looking at neighbourhood, local authority, and regional level.

- **the Government should accept the key recommendation of the Kennedy Report, endorsed in the Fryer Report, that it should establish a lifetime entitlement to education up to NVQ level 3, or its equivalent, which is free for young people and those who are socially and economically deprived.** NIACE recognises that this is an economic challenge, but believes that the Government needs, as a minimum, to declare an intention to achieve the Kennedy goal over time. At the same time as we are having difficulty with this proposal, the Norwegians are preparing legislation to offer everyone of any age the right to free higher education;

- **the Government should accept the Fryer Committee's recommendations on a voluntary code of practice for learning in the workplace, and should review the success of the voluntary approach after three years.** NIACE has long believed that participation in developing the skills for people at work should be as necessary for employers as securing health and safety at work. However, we recognise that the Government is committed to trying to make the voluntary route work. We believe the proposals developed by the National Advisory Group for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning are better than the arguments in the Green Paper in achieving that end. Participation in IiP, participation by temporary and part-time workers, and provision for the least qualified and skilled should all be measures in the review;

- **the Government needs to give greater recognition to the need to promote participation in learning, to motivate those groups of adults currently under-represented to join in.** This issue is partially addressed in the proposals for the University for Industry, but is inadequately addressed in the policy overall. NIACE's experience in Adult Learners' Week and Ford's in the EDAP provision illustrate that targeted promotional measures can mobilise under-represented groups; Black Country Access Federation research showed that untargeted, local expansion of demand replicates the socio-economic profile of existing students;

- **the Government should reintroduce a statutory obligation on all terrestrial broadcasters to include promotional and educational programming on mainstream mass audience channels, and to include such programming in peak viewing periods.** The BBC Family Literacy advertising campaign and Adult Learners' Week show the potential of broadcasting in mobilising people. The arrival of digital channels will offer

rich new possibilities, but will not replace the role of mass viewing channels in stimulating people to join in;

- **the Government needs to give priority to the specific needs of groups currently under-represented in education and training, and in particular to:**
  - **unskilled manual workers**
  - **people without qualifications**
  - **unemployed people**
  - **some groups of women**
  - **many men**
  - **refugees and some minority ethnic communities**
  - **older adults**
  - **people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities**
  - **offenders and ex-offenders**
  - **in addition to people with literacy and/or numeracy difficulties.**

It should consider a number of curriculum initiatives, among them:

- **to improve provision for people needing English for Speakers of Other Languages;**
- **to introduce a national centre for the recognition of qualifications gained overseas;**
- **to give particular attention to the learning needs of older people, and to report these to the inter-ministerial group looking at their needs overall;**
- **ensure that developments to support the implementation of the *Inclusive Learning* recommendations are available to learners in all institutional contexts funded by the FEFCs;**
- **ensure that the basic skills needs of people with learning difficulties are addressed in the work of the Moser committee.**

Whilst *The Learning Age* makes a strong general case for learning opportunities to be available to all, it is weaker in NIACE's view on the specific barriers to be overcome for different groups if the system is to be really accessible.

Developing a positive and inclusive response to the ageing population is a major policy challenge in all areas of Government, and calls for a coherent response to the learning needs of those in the later stages of their working lives as well as those who have fully or partially retired. On grounds of equity they deserve more attention than *The Learning Age* recognises, since this is the group who benefited least from initial education, and who participate least in learning now. Furthermore, education can enable older people to make a more active contribution to society, and can reduce the costs of health and welfare services by stimulating them both intellectually and physically. We welcome the contribution DfEE is currently making to the Better Government for Older People initiative, but believe that more needs to be done. NIACE's Older and Bolder advisory group is submitting a detailed response on the specific issues in this field, with recommendations for action.

- **the Government should recognise the importance of successful orientation to learning as a success factor in its New Deal programme, and extend Gateway provisions to participants over the age of 25**. As we argue above, NIACE is concerned that the adult New Deal may become a pale shadow of the provision made for younger people, weakening the impact of the programme overall;

- **the Government should advise the FEFCs that initiatives designed to increase access (e.g. basic skills summer schools or childcare funding) should be available to learners taking further education courses wherever they are learning.** Too many recent initiatives taken by the FEFC in England have limited development funding to sector colleges, risking the emergence of second class opportunities for learners in 'external' institutions;

- **the Government should also recognise the risk of initiative and bidding fatigue among providers, as initiatives pile up.** An excess of competitive bidding rounds can privilege the bigger and better resourced organisations, and exclude smaller agencies, however good their ideas;

- **the Government should instigate a range of pilot programmes to ensure that education for citizenship gets the practical development *The Learning Age* calls for;**

- **the Government should introduce programmes to stimulate developments in family learning and in work with disaffected young people;**

- **the Government should ensure that arrangements are put in place to create effective collaboration between OFSTED and the FEFC Inspectorate, and between both and QAA and the Training Inspectorate to guarantee that all publicly funded provision enjoys the support and oversight of inspection.** The effect of the definition of responsibilities for OFSTED and the FEFC inspectorate in the 1992 legislation has been to render an important tranche of FEFC funded provision in LEAs invisible, and without access to the rigours of inspection. This anomaly needs to be overcome through Government action;

- **the Government needs to ensure that staff development and training is available to all part-time and full-time staff working in post-school education and training organisations - and NIACE recommends a minimum of five days release each year for full-time staff, and one hour in twenty for hourly paid staff to that end.** We are concerned that the decision to establish an Institute for Learning and Teaching in higher education has been taken without asking what benefit such an institution might serve in all lifelong learning contexts. There is a need to strengthen the role of training in LEA provision and to use the emergent NTOs to ensure

comparable access to professional updating for teachers throughout post-compulsory education;

- **the Government should ensure that planning for lifelong learning should take place at neighbourhood, local authority and regional level.** The case for effective inter-agency planning for the education of adults has been recognised since the appearance of the 1944 Act. Such planning needs to go on at a number of levels. In neighbourhood provision it can be secured as a condition of the release of public money. Education plans should be co-ordinated by local authorities for their areas, but include FE, HE, TEC, voluntary sector, employer and employee interests; and TECs should have a parallel duty in respect of training plans for their areas. The University for Industry will have a key role, too. The FEFC regional bodies, in collaboration with Regional Development Agencies should ensure that regional plans address issues that cross local boundaries;

- **the Government should commission studies on the rate of return of investment in further education and in community based provision**. Too little data is available on the economic case for investment in lifelong learning;

- **the Government should consult with providers and their representatives to ensure that data collected on participation, retention and achievement is consistent across institutions and sectors**. Analysis of this data should inform future policy and planning;

- **the Government should increase the research investment in lifelong learning, to include longitudinal studies so that the present dearth of research evidence on what works best can be overcome in time.**

NIACE urges the Government to ensure that widening participation and higher standards are pursued hand in hand, and that its policies on lifelong learning cover learning at all ages. Work is needed to improve the dialogue between its schools and post-schools work.

International Experience

29. Finally, there is little in the paper that recognises Britain's place as a member of a global community. The EU, OECD and UNESCO have all highlighted the importance of lifelong learning, many countries are currently engaged in policy debates on this issue, and several EU members have recently published policy papers on it. The UK is an effective and active contributor to transnational debates, as it demonstrated recently during its Presidency of the EU, and could benefit from active sharing of ideas and experience. NIACE urges the Department to ensure that policy development in the UK is informed by the best of international practice.

Adult Guidance and the Learning Age

The absence of clear proposals for developing adult guidance about learning and work is the most conspicuous gap in *The Learning Age*.
This is particularly unfortunate in view of the general trend towards a more individualised labour market. It is also inconsistent with the broad thrust of *The Learning Age* towards using market processes to shape the education and training system.

Major Issues

There are four major issues to be resolved:

- how the broad territory of information, advice and guidance is to be segmented for funding purposes;
- how a coherent service is to be developed, given the multiple and conflicting responsibilities of the various agencies;
- how appropriate databases are to be assembled, and more critically, maintained;
- how public funding is to be channelled into services..

Definitions

In its early documents, the national Guidance Council proposed that a distinction should be drawn between Information and Advice, which should be publicly funded, and Guidance, which might be charged for. However, the boundary between the two is not clear or agreed. At a recent NICEC seminar on ILAs, the idea that guidance should be more closely allied to teaching - seeing it as a process delivered through teaching (group guidance) or as a form of teaching (the tutorial process). If this were adopted guidance could be funded through the mainstream funding channels of FE and HE. This would be consistent with the FEFC funding model, and some current practice, but raises issues about impartiality, and in depth guidance/counselling for the (relatively small) proportion of people who need this before approaching an educational institution or agency.

Local Networks

Despite the availability of Learning Direct, most information and advice enquiries are likely to continue to be handled locally, and will require knowledge of local circumstances, informal resources, and close feedback loops into local and regional providers of education and training. Since the publication of *The Challenge of Change* by UDACE in 1985 there had been widespread support in the profession for a model of delivery based on multi agency networks, to facilitate intelligence gathering, referral and responsiveness to different client needs. However, the mechanisms for financing such networks have never been secure, few have managed to survive consistently over a long term.

While there is widespread support for the network model, it requires considerable mutual trust among agencies, and a clear structure for handling finances. The allocation of responsibility for this has never been clear. It has been argued that to secure trust and impartiality, the role of convening a network should rest with an agency not directly responsible for course provision. On these grounds the case has been argued, and models adopted, for giving the role to TECs, LEAs, Careers Companies or UfI.

The role fits reasonably with TECs, which are not providers, but their explicit focus on employment raises problems, especially where they interpret it narrowly. Much guidance will be about academic and non-vocational learning routes.

The Challenge of Change argued the case for LEAs, on ground of democratic accountability, but they were often seen as partial as the "owners" of the FE institutions. This is now less of a problem, since only a small part of FE remains in their hands, but it is not clear whether, in the new structure of local government, they would all be able to take on the role.

The role of the Careers Service in adult guidance has always been contentious. Government has been anxious to ring fence limited resources for the statutory clients, but some have ventured into extensive adult services, especially since they became Careers Companies. Some in the adult guidance world view them with suspicion because their roots are in guidance for young people, which is sometimes seen as a distinct territory.

UfI has the provision of information, advice and guidance in its remit. If UfI is to have a strong local presence (as implied by the funding of local networks under ADAPT UfI) then this function would sit very naturally with them. In some areas UfI consortia already include most or all of the agencies and individuals who one would wish to see in a network. As with TECs, there might be anxieties about the explicit focus on employment related learning, though UfI consortia might deliver services under other brands.

Databases

Learning Direct is in the process of assembling the most complex national database to support telephone advice. Some providers operate only at national level, and many can cope with producing data in appropriate formats. However, the level of local detail and the volatility of data means that a national database will always have difficulty keeping up with needs. The original proposals for Learning Direct prepared by the Guidance Council assumed the creation of local guidance networks which would complement the national service, providing a data gathering and validating function at local level, and might be the principal repository of local intelligence. In some regions networks already exist in a well developed state to do this, in others there is little in place. If this model were to be adopted there would need to be work on establishing consistent procedures for gathering and organising data, and for its exchange between neighbouring networks, and with Learning Direct nationally.

The principal problem with such models is always maintenance of volatile data, and the limited priority which providers are likely to give it (most recruitment to programmes does not happen through guidance agencies, and operating separate data management systems is not a high priority for providers in public or private sectors).

An alternative model is to develop a Web based approach, under which common protocols are developed for presenting information about programmes on the World Wide Web, and agencies (including Learning Direct) can then access these direct. This is a more attractive model for data providers, since they have control over their own data input, yet it will be searchable at national level through common search procedures. This model would fit well with the development of UfI Learning Centres and the National Grid for Learning, which would provide local access for most people, and home access for many. The resource would be available, constantly updated, for professional guidance agencies, in much the same way as similar information is available to travel agents.

The difficulty with this model is, of course, the quality of the information, and its impartiality - education and training providers will wish to use their Websites as marketing tools. As always there is a trade off between availability and quality of information. The Web based option increases availability at the cost of impartiality, and requires client education in interpreting information, the central database model increases data quality and impartiality, but risks information not becoming available at all, and would require strong mechanisms to ensure that providers make information available.

Funding

Since guidance is the service which enables people to make informed decisions in the education and training market, there is a good case that it should not be charged for at all. If any charges are to be made for education and training it should be for the courses, rather than the guidance which enables people to choose the right course. In this way it contributes to individual motivation, to efficiency among providers (reduced drop out etc.), increased long term employability, and overcoming social exclusion.

Guidance development has been bedevilled for decades by short term funding. Projects have repeatedly demonstrated and established good practice and then collapsed when money ran out. Consistency of funding is essential to any adequate public service. Currently CSNA figures show a drop in TEC funding for adult guidance of 33% between 1997-8 and 1997-9, and a 6% drop in the local authority sum. There is real concern that services will disappear before the UfI structures are in place.

The Guidance Council reluctantly accepted the notion of a freely available front line service, with a charge for more extensive or specialised services. There is room to doubt whether this model will work in practice. Most of those most in need of extensive services are likely to be publicly funded anyway (long term unemployed, low incomes, redundant..). An alternative is to allow individuals to use some or all of their ILA to buy guidance, although there is no clear agreement about how such services might be priced.

Other Issues

Common branding

Guidance as a concept is not well understood (the Guidance Council are currently carrying out a market research study which examines this issue among others). It is important that a common identity is established for such services, so that promotion in one place reinforces that in another. The simplest approach would be to use the UfI

brand, but there are questions about how the public at large will perceive the UfI brand, and whether the title will discourage some kinds of potential client.

Progress File

Logically, guidance processes interlock with the processes of reflection and recording, which the Progress File seeks to encourage. Developments ought to be consistent in the two fields.

Outreach

If guidance is to contribute to widening participation, it is important that guidance staff can go out into excluded communities to promote learning and offer advice in appropriate locations. Staffing levels need to recognise this.

"Barefoot Guidance"

Much guidance is provided not by guidance professionals but by managers, supervisors, trades union officers, and others in the community (inside and outside the workplace). Although such people cannot all be expected to have formal guidance qualifications, developing mechanisms to provide them with backup support and training, at a variety of levels, could be a very cost effective investment.

Quality

The quality of guidance services needs to be guaranteed, both in terms of the services provided and the qualifications of the staff involved. The Guidance Council has produced quality standards for services which can provide the basis for this, and ought to be mandatory on those offering services.

Guidance and curriculum

More explicit development of the links between the curriculum and guidance could be very cost effective. The provision of taster courses, of guidance modules within FE and HE institutions, outreach group sessions in community locations, and open days are all ways in which education and training providers are already offering kinds of "guidance" to individuals. Such models could benefit from more systematic development.